AUTHORS' FIELD DAY
A Symposium on Marxist Criticism

Robert Cantwell

HAVEN'T been conscious of any great assistance from the criticism of my work in The New Masses. Nor from the criticism of the work of other writers. I was disappointed in the review of The Land of Plenty; I had expected a political analysis of the book and the comments made on it were distinguished by their vagueness. The Land of Plenty is, quite simply, a work of propaganda. Some of the problems raised in it seem to me to deserve a critical discussion. In one section of the story, for instance, the workers take possession of the factory in spite of a police guard thrown around it. It seemed to me that this seizure of the factory developed naturally out of the situation that had been built up to that point. But when I came to write of the actual details of the seizure I ran into some new problems I had not thought of before—I tried to imagine what would actually happen, in the sort of community I pictured, when the workers entered the factories, what new factors entered a strike situation, what advantages were gained, what new hazards were encountered. It seemed to me too that the problem was important, one the working-class of this country must some day face. When I came to write this, as I say, I was stoped; I couldn't imagine clearly what would happen, and the novel suffers as a result. But I wanted at least to state the problem, in the hope that it might be discussed, critically, that the imaginations of others might be directed to envisioning it more clearly than I could. Perhaps this answers your question of what I expect from the critics. If the limitations of my picture of this event were clearly established, somebody else might be helped to imagine comparable events more concretely. And that seems to me to be a great part of our task as novelists and critics; we can work out, in our own imaginations, some of the problems the working-class must face in actuality; we can fight out on paper some of the real battles that are coming, and so be a little better prepared for them. If we can visualize them concretely, in detail, the terrible costs of progress may be a little reduced.

Why not? Does this kind of criticism seem too detailed and technical? If it seems so, think of the space you wasted in those prolonged, careful, elaborate—and absolutely meaningless—discussions of the difference between the "simple" and the "collective" novel—for instance. If necessary, let the organizers review the strike novels occasion ally, and give them a chance to say what they really think. Let the revolutionary poets, once in awhile, review books on international politics; let the Marxian economists review books of revolutionary verse. But above all stop those hair-splitting analyses of problems that nobody but the critic ever worries about, and get the discussions down to earth.

Erskine Caldwell

IN SO many words, my complaint against criticism, both revolutionary and static, is that it is about 90 percent soap-suds. All reviewers, as a body, tend to soft-soap the reader, the author, or themselves. The result is a swill of lather as full of air, hot or cold according to their political status, as the great out-of-doors. Reading is an experience. I don't see how in the long run anything else can be claimed for it. And if reading is an experience, then it seems to me that the reviewer should report its effect upon him and its probable effect upon the average reader. If a book fails to create an experience, its failure lies not in its technical form, but in its emotional appeal.

It may seem that this is exactly what reviewers are doing. But as a hardened reviewer-reader, I don't think so. My mouth is full of suds and my head swims in a sea of soap-bubbles. A Marxist critic can work up just as much lather from a cake of soap as a capitalist reviewer.

New Masses reviewers are already two steps ahead of the field, in that they have achieved a clear-cut view of economic life and that they have at their finger-tips the inspired power to give old words new meanings. Let all of us, critics and would-be critics, throw away the cake of soft-soap. If the book is fine, let's not shampoo the author, but give his creation its due; and likewise if it is terrible, let's not fill our own ears with lather, but bury the book so deep even the worms can't reach it.

Jack Conroy

I HAVE been asked to say what I think of the critical policy of The New Masses and specifically what I think of the criticism of The Disinherited. There were minor points in Mike Gold's review that struck me as fallacious, but I am sure that I have been helped by the criticism. I have a sensitive nose for malicious carping, but I could find none of it in Mike's review. Mike was re-affirming that faith in proletarian writers which he had held steadfastly when proletarian literature was a laughing stock for all the Olympian critics who have at last been forced to recognize its existence. Max Eastman, in the course of a diatribe against The New Masses in the current Modern Monthly, indignantly cries: "Gold believes that anything written by a ditch-digger or an elevator boy has some inherent excellence, whether the man happens to be able to write or not. He agrees with the Russian, Pletnev, who wanted to base the Institute of Proletarian Culture on the proposition that 'the proletarian artist will be at once an artist and a worker.'" Horrors! How could anybody be a bona fide artist if he is at the same time a worker? We are seeing a re-evaluation of artistic values, and the conception of an "artist" as an exotic creature remote from the everyday affairs of the working class is one illusion The New Masses is effectually shattering, and this accounts for the singular
fury with which the magazine is being attacked by "artists" unwilling to descend from their lofty pedestals atop the Sacred Grove and mingle with the sweaty, vulgar workers. If Mike Gold never writes another word of criticism, he has earned the gratitude of proletarian writers and readers for his dogged insistence that there is an "inherent excellence" in the writing of workers who feel deeply and portray as best they can, even if crudely, the vital things about their existence. The state Bohemian writer, recognizing the vigor of the new proletarian literature, sadly contemplates his own wilted creative phallus, and howls that the Goddess of Pure Art is being raped by a barbarian.

Margaret Cheney Dawson

I CAN definitely say that the criticism of my book in The New Masses has helped me, though perhaps less by convincing me of the particular point it attacked than by suggesting that I had made a fair enough job in depicting the futility of the sexual mores of bourgeois intellectuals, I had not shown any connection between this side of their lives and the confusion, emptiness and essential vulgarity of their professional activities. At first it seemed to me that the critic was making the mistake (a frequent one, I believe, in Marxist criticism) of trying to force all materials into a certain mould, and of insisting that every social issue be made explicit to an artificial degree. However, I agree that an author who touches a social question at any angle must have a lively awareness, and must make his readers aware, of the related angles. For failure to do this, the whole school of introspective writing may be fairly indicted. I should not again attempt to draw any scene or tackle any problem without giving my work more body, making it in itself a more coherent statement, and trying to give it a valid relation to its chosen background.

From the Marxist critics, I should want a criticism on just such points. My idea of the function of Marxist criticism is that it should separate the organic from the inorganic in literature—I.e., that it should examine all kinds of writing to discover which elements in it have a life nourished by vital forces, which are sterile repetitions of stuff that once was significant but has now reached the limit of its development, and which are simply devoid of roots, native or borrowed. A number of extraordinarily stupid judgments come from the confusion of these categories, I feel, as when one was that was a healthy vital art of a previous period is criticized for its limitations in regard to our own age; or when a book is taken to have no roots, and no serious implications, because these are not exposed in a certain dogmatically defined manner. The opposite seems also to be true of many critics who believe themselves to be literary Marxists—the material counts with them for every-

thing. Such critics do not admit that good material badly handled is dead matter, a piece of prose who is the training of the critical intelligence to a dead stop right there.

Obviously these stupidities are not inherent in the Marxian approach, and at their worst, they are a hundred times outweighed by the senselessness of the art for art's sake school, or the no-propaganda-in-art cry. I believe that Marxian criticism who is interested in us must turn for any comment that has more validity than the expression of a mere personal preference.

Edward Dahlberg

I N 1926 Mike Gold listed a number of Marxist critics who had the insight and the equipment to examine and evaluate revolutionary novels and poems, but who, up till then, had made no marked impression upon readers or writers. Among them were Max Eastman and Joe Freeman. It is 1934 and what Mike Gold said then still holds. Max Eastman is a renegade; Joe Freeman is a brilliant raconteur and rewrite man. The business of Marxist criticism has fallen into other hands. Joshua Kunitz, our most able critic, who has genuine warmth and sympathy with the problems of the revolutionary writer, has, unfortunately, confined himself to Soviet literature. Granville Hicks has done some pionering work, but he promiscuously lumps names together, and makes no graduated distinctions between writers, except political ones.

The problems confronting the poet and the novelist, the creative dilemma and the very-processes involved in writing, he is either not interested in or does not comprehend. There is still much of the humanist and the theocratic New Englander in his temper. Sometimes one actually gets the impression that Hicks dislikes good writing, and that the nuances and pugnacities of prose are, if not offensive to him, at least foreign. Often the reader feels that Hicks would like to annihilate several centuries of sensibilities and start anew. Some of our other critics are visiviscionists and internes who use poems and novels as cadavers. They recall the incident of the comrade who was constantly repeating, "I am only a simple worker, I don't understand literature," but who immediately proceeded to sly every writer, poet and book in sight.

Aside from this our movement should have the greatest culture of our times and the services of the most brilliant pens. And we should therefore be exceedingly wary of "comradely criticism" of writers sympathetic to the revolution and a too devastating analysis of those novelists who bring the functions of oblique glances at the Communist Party. Unfortunately, five hundred words can in no sense be more than a fractional statement of Marxist criticism. And this should be accepted as an epistle and not as a picture of the entire scene. Doubtless the cumulative effect of all the statements in the symposium will be much nearer the truth than this.

NEW MASSES

Vardis Fisher

A NY author must discover, it seems to me, that his point of view, as well as the point of view of those who praise or damn him, rests chiefly on prejudice. Read what critics have to say of my books before you see my book in distortions and an attempt to see my own more clearly as they antagonize those of another. With the Marxian point of view, nevertheless, I have a deep but quite unreasonable sympathy; for I see our present difficulties not as class struggle at all but as that combination of greed, superstition and fear which still bedevils us. My sympathy is further unreasonable because I object to Marxist criticism for precisely the same reasons that I object to any doctrine that refuses to see in caprice and exploitation a vicious and inevitable result of that superi-

Redevelopment of Trotsky shows at its most hopeless extreme the notion that a social system can be found that can free humanity or truly improve the condition of man. But Marxian criticism as I see it still descends to the childishness of personal attack; stings to the body of a stupid tradition concerned with places and villains; and still rests its whole ideology upon the assumption that human beings are what most unmissably they are now. And while I am not sure that its adolescence is idealism does me any good, I do find in it both earnestness and vitality; and that is a hell of a lot more than I can say for certain Olympian and empty aestheticism that endures in and around New York.

James T. Farrell

NEW MASSES criticisms of my work have never raised challenging issue that warrant reply. I think that The New Masses can be most serviceable to writers by presenting a continuous body of soundly conceived reviews and criticisms which will see both to enlarge the public for relevant works of merit, and to develop in this public an increasingly more exacting and critical set of reading habits. One of the primary tasks of clarifying their orientation. This problem can be generalized in the statement that critics must organize and inter-relate their conceptions of literature, both as an art and as an instrument of social control. Such an exercise would permit them to formulate a cohesive foundation of principles and hypotheses, and then would be less irrationalism in their works.
July 3, 1934

The still feels that they often blindly snatch explanations and reasons to explain their reactions. Likewise, there have been occa-
sions when critics, wanting to offer an interpretation of the social backgrounds of American literature have recited a few sociological and economic commonplace, married the commonplace to literary works, and inserted pieces on the intellectual level of the papers and popular histories. Likewise, they solved gratuitous problems. Thus, they have illustrated what themes that general-
ization, "the proletarian writer," may utilize, what books will or will not stimulate. They bid fair to endow "the proletarian
or" with the same kind of irrelevancy now engulfs "the economic man" of social economy. Although critics have been
laid in their appreciations since the inaugura-
tion of the weekly New Masses, they are
not free from the vice of revolutionary
liberty. This vice is largely the product of
hypostasized conception of social classes, it
upon the obvious of definitions and the
tions of the most unmistakably and
ly restless phase of class struggle
furnishing themselves from this vice, and by
bewildering gratuituities, they can concentrate on
of their most important problems. Liter-
traditions, no more than the principles of
ance, are the property of one class. One
critical problem is that of perceiving qualities
human use and worth in books and literary
ctions which can be carried over into a
ew class system without any essential loss of
their worth and use. Critics have praised dearly writing, largely,
seems, because of the author's revolutionary
ct matter or his good intentions. If hor
must be praised for their revolutionary
intentions, I would suggest a division of
ction. Besides reviews and criticisms, let
be a new department created under the
charge of Department of Professional Encourag-

Virgil Geddes

Literary critics, of course, are notoriously
foolish of books of plays and dramatic
icism. They know practically nothing of
what goes on in the theatre and for the most
part are unable to judge a play in print from
the level of literature. They will review a
tune like Dos Passos's Three Plays, to be
true, but because Dos Passos is a novelist, not
cause his plays are or are not important.
areas of inferior novels, books of poetry, etc.,
reviewed each week in our journals, but
ys have to make three times as much noise
the world even to be considered on their
.
The dramatist, then, as far as criticism on
work is concerned, is neither helped nor
frared from the critical and literary press
is simply left in the dark and neglected.
less is true of our revolutionary maga-
ies, because revolutionaries have a higher
ard for the theatre as a social value. But
here this condition has not been entirely
medicated. The superior attitude toward dra-
matic writing has not yet been overcome.

I suggest, then, a consideration of play-
wrights as writers. On the revolutionary side
during the past year there has been, I believe,
as much good work done in the play form as
in the novel and in poetry. Its quality, its
reach and its contemporary interest compare
well with the work of other writers.

You ask: "What do you expect from
Marxian critics?"

So far, Marxian analysis has been valuable
to me in a broad and general way rather than
in any specific sense. It has given me a
broader historical consciousness, without which
no writer can develop and mature. There has
been little change in my writings since the
recent and more concentrated spread of the
Marxian viewpoint in America. A look at my
past work shows me that for many years it
has been developing in the direction which
Marxian analysis stands for and encourages.

I am for criticism with virus and a revolu-
tionary bias: they give it effect, value and
result. The application of strict Marxian
criticisms to literature, however, tends to be
more of a criticism on a work rather than of
it. There should be more interest in men and
their work for what they are than for what
they are not.

Robert Gessner

I have not thought it the function of a
writer to pen elaborate criticisms to his
critic, a "bourgeois habit" which creates and
maintains the circulation of those ineptous
organisms you see in the Greenwich Village book-
shops. Why then am I as a revolutionary writer
criticizing a revolutionary critic? Because we
revolutionaries have in common an interest
which transcends any aesthetic quibbling: we
are interested in the writer if he is at all
revolutionary, i.e., perfecting our writing as a
force aiding the proletariat in a Communist
revolution.

What kind of criticism then should a revolu-
tionary writer expect from a revolutionary
magazine? His work should be given the
same scrutiny from the point of view of
Marxism-Leninism as to its value for the
proletariat in formulating and intensifying their
movement toward rebellion. What criticism
did my poem Uprising get from one of the
editors of The New Masses? Simply an
aesthetic analysis. This revolutionary critic
concerned himself solely with image and di-
tion, complaining that "the imagery lacks in-
volatility; sometimes it is frankly questionable
.. occasionally ... unpleasantly superfluous
... overlong stretches of violent language." Such
phrases are more at home in a Village
tet, or in company with the aesthetic critic
of the Nation, who writes "astonished" that
Uprising was a "book," not a poem or a series
of poems." Aesthetics may be important, but
the editor of the revolutionary New Masses
should not give only aesthetic criticism; and
from that standard alone take a superior at-
titude of condemnation through faint praise,

labeling Uprising "a valiant attempt." The
same holds for Alfred Hayes' review in the
Daily Worker, when he complained of my
violent language, punctuation and reference to
lice. Lice, as Michael Gold long pointed out,
means poverty; it may be too bad for aesthetic
reasons, but in proletarian poetry poverty can-
not be ignored. However, no so-called revoluti-
onary critic has yet criticized Uprising as to
its revolutionary intent.

Consequently I can't say that the critici-
ts to date of my work in The New
Masses has helped me (letters from un-
esthetic, class-conscious workers have), be-
cause it has not been revolutionary criticism
based on Marxism-Leninism. Instead it has
been superficial aestheticism derived from
bourgeois hang-ups. Earl Browder in the
first quarterly issue called attention to such
treatment of Gellert's lithographs. For how
much longer will such criticism continue to
contradict the columns of a revolutionary
magazine devoted to the proletarian revolu-
tion?

Lauren Gillilan

The review in The New Masses helped
—but slightly. I sense a one-sided under-
standing.

I am glad when people say my book has
significance, but the book is printed and past
mending.

Adverse criticism and comparison should be
stimulating. But I was disappointed. How-
ever: the reviewer explains my position rela-
tive to a "cutie" hanging about the outskirts
of strike activities. I had hoped that the
intelligent reader would be aware of my
awareness, i.e., that I was treating myself
objectively as a "Smith College girl.
Personals should be left out of literary criti-
cisms. I had thought the reader would realize
and accept the conscious limitations of my
book. There were not to be "further steps."
The book stops at a certain point and there
it is. Books should be taken for what they
are and judged for their worth. In this book
my only thesis was humanity itself—the
credible conditions under which humans can
still exist.

I want to understand and consider Marxian
critics as I wish them to understand and
consider me. I am American bourgeois, tradition-
ally white-collar, not a foreigner.

I feel, as Mr. Kallet says, that "Marxists
have never mastered the mechanics of Ameri-
can mass opinion." I feel that perhaps I am
more in sympathy with the masses than
Marxists I have met. I am even better able
perhaps to speak the language of the American
masses than my comrade associates. Therefore
I reject their ignorant patronage as they resent
my criticism.

I believe in the "predestined victory of the
proletariat," but I feel that America will not
soon call itself proletariat. It is a foreign
word.

Marxism to me is one of a group of phil-
osophies with the same ultimate end. But it
seems most workable and practical for the masses, and therefore I prefer it. I do not feel myself "above the battle." I am fighting for life itself. Why should I "come humble?" I prefer pride—mankind's rightful heritage, and I will fight for it. I will not "try hard to be revolutionary." I am revolutionary. But Communism is not the only kind of revolu-
tion. Have you ever read Bellamy? He shows how the masses can rise without conventional revolution.

What was it Lenin said about "the infantile sickness of left Communism?" I should re-
commend for the Marxists less awkwardness, more manners—more polishing of the dia-
mond. The good things of the past should not be thrown away. To be steely-strong and steely- flexible.

Also don't despise humor. You know, laughter is next to still waters.

Josephine Herbst

T HE first half of Granville Hicks' review of Pity Is Not Enough was taken up with a
discussion of the probable conflicts in my
different personal attitudes in writing the
book. Its purpose was apparently to show
that the material was not relevant. All this
labor was given to attack one of the first
historical native novels that attempted a realistic
portrayal of the past. For James T. Farrell, Harri
Greerly, and Frank Sweney, to mention
only a few of the left-wing critics who reviewed
the book in other places, Pity Is Not Enough
was obviously written to explain our Ameri-
can present. Nowhere in Hicks' review does
he seem to gather the significance of this story
that deals with the defeat of rugged individ-
ualism at the hands of the capitalist system.
The story is about one of the thousands of
eager men who did not succeed in our era of
expansion that piled up the great fortunes.
That the system, not color blindness, or frus-
trated love or inherited syphilis is the cause of
the failure is clear on every page. To whom
is such a book not relevant? Has that class
completely disappeared like the dodo bird or
is it still with us convinced that "a little cap-
ital!" may even get it out of the depression.
They are still with us and the Communist Party
would be millions strong. Their fate still
needs interpretation.

But my chief shaft against the type of criti-
cism my book has drawn upon it in The New
Masses refers to a later article dealing
with the historical novel in which Pity Is Not
Enough is given one disparaging line. Here
was a book that in the earlier review Gran-
vile Hicks even, termed important and re-
sourceful and rich and yet such are the exi-
gencies of the critical life that nothing sur-
vives but the faint words that the book is not
relevant. The old bogey raises its head and
it is all that it does raise. In that article, only
the negative phases of historical treatment are
presented with any conviction. Cather and
Wilder are dragged in for what they are not, but
where is Tolstoy's War and Peace? Where is
Stephen Crane's Red Badge of

Courage. And if I may say so modestly, where
is my own book that does not present a flat-
tering dreamlike picture of the past which
the critic so lustily deplores. I have been left
out in very good company. But what is im-
portant to point out is the contradiction in
Granville Hicks' assigning me to the irrelevant
heap at the same time that he makes continual
references to novelists who can have no im-
portance to any vital writer today. Cather
and Wilder merely clutter up the picture,
what they have to give can be gotten from
better sources, and in fact Hicks only re-
turns to them for what they cannot give. As for
Henry James, the mere mention of his name
assumes the presence and importance of a class
for whom Pity Is Not Enough cannot pos-
sibly be irrelevant. And we come to the chief
contradiction in Hicks' critical method. Hicks
might assume that only an audience strictly
proletarian was of value. He does not so
assume as he quite obviously writes for the
same people as I, those border people who are
falling by the wayside and whose tragic back-
ground Pity Is Not Enough took such pains
to reveal. He is directing his energies, as his
references imply, to the middle class, the lower
middle class, the intellectuals, those people so
beautifully designated as swamp people who
in the final disintegration have no place of
their own, who must throw their forces with
the proletariat or perish. The question simply
is, are these people worth writing about and
for, for himself; for me, a creative writer, appear-
tly there is another measuring rod.

Granville Hicks' attitude toward the his-
torical novel as revealed in his article shows
he knows too little about it. No one can
hand out themes for any creative writing but
to hand out the Chartist Revolt, the French
Revolution and the Paris Commune to writers
in this country who have marvelous material
like gold nuggets lying all around them, is the
most completely revealing irresponsibility I ever
saw and it makes me wonder if Hicks and I
understand the same thing by that word.

Criticism should broaden the base of cre-
ative writing, not narrow it. It is a pretty
general flaw with New Masses criticism, and
Hicks is by no means the only one guilty,
that it is niggardly and patronizing. I want
robust enjoyment of writing again.

John Howard Lawson

I HAVE already expressed rather fully my
own specific reaction to a review of my
work in The New Masses. When I ob-
jected to Mike Gold's critique of my plays
on the ground that it was an "unbalanced
attack and failure to weigh tendencies," some
of my friends wrongly assumed that I ex-
pected Marxian criticism to be mild, tepid and
unemotional—to maintain the sort of fake-
ooiness which is one of the pretenses of
liberals! Obviously, such a notion would be
completely alien to the nature of proletarian
criticism, which must be alive with the passion
of genuine partisanship.

NEW MASS

My special interest lies in the field of the
theater. In looking over The New Masses sin-
since January, I find the dramatic revie-
ws have been somewhat irregular, and neither
incise nor as scientific as one might wish.
By far the best theatrical review is Mr.
Gold's brilliant write-up of Stevedor
which combines great breadth of approach
with a clear study of the play. The
intensity of the critic's feeling, the fulness
of the emotion aroused, add to
awareness of faults.

In the field of book-reviews (and partic-
ularly in dealing with the bourgeois novel)
find a tendency toward vagueness and lack
of punch. Most of the bourgeois novels public-
at the present time are rather alike in the
quality of frustration, cynicism and aesthetic
smartness. However, I think our critics have
a way of being too conventional and gene-
ral in describing this frustration. For in-
stance, the reviews of Out of Life by Myron
Brin An Altar in the Fields by Ludwig Lewist
are the New Masses are The Unpossessed by
Tess Slesinger—these
views, and those of other novels of the same
style, are completely sound—but the views
of another writer of fiction has written a no-
the story of middle class decay is not espe-
cially revealing or important. If these books
are worth reviewing at all, it seems to me ne-
cessary to go a little deeper into the particu-
lar content of the author's point of view—
 isolate the particular germ of frustration,
show the author's special relation to bourge-
ous currents of thought. Such an analysis
(novels which have enough stuff in them to
worth analyzing) might be of consider-
ential value.

Henry Hart

I ASSUME this discussion is to be confi-
to what an author thinks of the critic who
reviewed his book in The New Masses.
Anyone who believes capitalism is criminal anti-social and can be extirpated only by rev-
lution, is ipso facto obligated to bury person-
irritation for the good of the cause. Bury
perhaps all it is humanly possible to do, this
is, of course, if your book got a sock in the
eye or a tap on the nose.

The latter, I think (Mr. Seaver may have
intended otherwise), is all my book got, at
my irritation undoubtedly has its inception
in my pathetic wish that Mr. Seaver had urged
every comrade to read it and treasure it as
classic. My rationalization of the irritation
however, took the following form.

I felt it was irrelevant to deplore my not
having dealt with the class struggle per
when my theme was the depiction of the for-
ility of the individual will to power in a cor-
rupt society. I felt that my book, in illus-
ating the mechanism by which democracy
is transformed into a plutocracy that has bee
fascist since the Civil War, had consider-
significance and a whole lot to say to the
readers of The New Masses could re-
with profit and, I would like to believe, with
enjoyment.
My rationalized irritation, therefore, assumes the guise of an attack on the method, the tactic, of book reviewing in a radical periodical. I arrive at this contention: that the pre-Revolution struggle must be conducted on two fronts and converts won by many means, and that all honest books presenting life as it actually is (to do this the author must necessarily be aware of and concern himself with the all-pervasive corruption of capitalism) should not be indicted under the blanket diagnosis of class-consciousness deficiency. Blanket diagnoses are always lazy.

On the general thesis of social versus aesthetic criticism, I think there can no longer be disagreement. Everyone believes, or should, that such archetypal concepts as pure beauty and similar frames of reference are adolescent and unworthy of anyone who loves life. The value of the kind of criticism The New Masses prints is to be found chiefly, I think, in its influence upon critics in the capitalist press and upon the capitalist publishers. With both of these animals I have had, and have, considerable to do, and I think I can testify that day-dreaming and romancing in both reviewing and publishing are perceptibly decreasing with an ever increasing velocity. To have instilled any awareness of the actual world into some critics and some publishers justifies any moment of uncompromising insistence upon the class aspects of literature.

In the end, I think, it comes down to this: it is better to be brave and overemphatic than to be safe and on-the-other-hand. So my deepest feeling is that The New Masses critics should hew to the Party line and let the chips fall where they may.

Myra Page

I've no interest in putting our critics on the spot. My quarrel is, we're getting too little of the real stuff.

Most writers feel as I do—our revolutionary literature is in need of a mature, well-grounded criticism. We want the help in mastering our craft which this could give. But standards come high. For critics, as writers. From a Marxian critic I expect some measure at least of what I found in Luncsharsky's articles on Gorky, in Lenin's "Tolstoy as a Mirror of the Revolution."

The literary method Marx and Engels developed in their correspondence with A.S. Pushkin, Minnie Kautsky, and other writers.

We can't expect our critics to be Marx or Lenin (nor writers, Shakespeare). We can expect a firm grasp on the method they use. That our critic knows his stuff, literature and what makes literature. This means in the first place, socially estimating a writer and his work. Placing both in dynamic and class perspective. And a critical dialectical analysis of his images, methods, compositions.

This social and class approach is what differentiates Marxian from bourgeois criticism. Many of our critics, however, have freed themselves only in part from the old bourgeois methods and approach in which they've been schooled. (Like to illustrate. Can't. The outrageous 500 word limit.) "Art is a Weapon," they repeat, but in practice, forget. That they're not in the classroom or salon, but speaking for and to a class fighting to destroy and rebuild the world. A class for whom books are necessarily a weapon. In-
In Reply to Authors

I'm for stiff criticism. Stiff self-criticism, too. We writers can take it. Even like it. We want to master our job, grow. But we expect our critics to draw us nearer to our readers, the reverse—and to approach us with that warm acceptance of “Ours,” criticizing in a spirit and manner that will send us back to our desks, eager to tackle our next and bigger job.

Edward Dahlberg's statements that I make 'intoxicated distinctions between political and non-political works,' that I 'get the impression that Dickens dislikes goody-goody writing,' are as ridiculous as they are baseless and deserve no comment. I am, however, genuinely sorry that some of the writers found nothing of value in my review of "Revolution and the Novel." I had thought, judging from a certain number of letters, not wholly unsuccessul. That my approach was rather artificial and schematic I knew, and I regret that it had to be, but I thought I had qualified my categories strongly enough and explained my method clearly enough to offset this fault. It occurs to me that authors might appreciate the reading of critical articles with the same patience and attention and willingness to cope with difficulties that they demand from the reviewers of their books.

Granville Hicks.

Since several of the foregoing letters refer explicitly to reviews I wrote, and since some of the references seem to me unfair, I am glad to have this occasion to reply. Robert Cantwell says that "The Land of Plenty is, quite simply, a work of propaganda." I do not know what he means, and I doubt if he does. I reviewed it as a serious attempt to portray the lives of representatives of the idea. For what seemed to me good reasons, I had to review it briefly. I indicated Cantwell's success in describing factory life and the states of mind it breeds, and I spoke of the conclusion as weak. That the defect is due to a breakdown of logic, in itself the result of inexperience, Cantwell correctly realizes. But it does not seem to me that he raises the point cogently enough for his novel to deserve the political discussion he demands. It strikes me, indeed, that to publish what one recognizes as a faulty novel in order to stimulate critical discussion is a curious procedure, and I wonder if it is not an idea that has occurred to Cantwell after the event. If Cantwell saw so clearly that he needed that sort of criticism, I do not see why he did not turn over the draft of his book to one of the experts of the T.U.U.L. A review naturally has to select among many comments that he might make. Under some circumstances he might well find his self compelled to treat strike strategy. The Land of Plenty means to me so remote from fundamental issues in its portrayal of the strike that almost any critic would feel that there were much more important projects for him to treat even if he had considered his book.

As for Josephine Herbst, it seems to me that she completely distorts the issue. I do not say that the material of her novel is irrelevant; that would be foolish. I said she very imperfectly perceives and conveys the relevance. I may be wrong, but that is the issue, and on that issue she says nothing new.

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